

Developments in EAP in India

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1. There have been three major hurdles to tertiary-level ELT-reform in India:
 - 1.1 The numbers of students (about 3½ million at the undergraduate level) and teachers (nearly 200,000 at this level, in all subjects; an estimated 40,000 in Departments of English) are such that any innovation designed centrally (e.g. at an English Language Teaching Institute or the headquarters of an affiliating University) has to pass through one or two tiers of teachers/teacher-trainers before it reaches the actual classroom. Problems of transmission and dissemination are, as a result, no fewer or easier than those of designing an innovation – and seriously limit one's options on the latter. Any programme of reform has thus to be judged not only by its professional soundness but equally by its operability through some form of remote control.
 - 1.2 Given the employment situation and the traditional link between University degrees and job opportunities, public examination and certification by Universities exerts a disproportionately strong influence on classroom procedures as well as on learners' attitudes, and frustrate any programme of change that is (or is seen to be) either in conflict with or irrelevant to passing examinations. Further, this overwhelming importance of examination-passing has over the years brought into being widely-used devices (such as predictable examination-questions, which demand merely knowledge of prescribed text-books, and a supply of memorisable answers to such questions either by the teacher in the classroom or by 'bazaar guides' in the market) which have destroyed any relationship between passing examinations and possessing proficiencies in English. Ironically, the most prevalent classroom procedure, viz a lecture by the teacher, has survived not because it contributes significantly to such examination-passing but because the availability of these other devices relieves it of any responsibility to prove its usefulness to that end. The result is that anyone who proposes an alternative to lecturing has also to argue his case on grounds other than examination-passing --thus sounding irrelevant or being branded 'abstract' or 'idealistic'.

- 1.3 The state of our professional knowledge has, until very recently, been such that the only way we could propose a change in the examination itself—i.e. substitute proficiency for knowledge of some prescribed text—was by specifying language-abilities in terms of structural items and vocabulary; and all such specifications (i) looked too much like school work and conflicted too violently with the accepted practice (and presumed propriety) of studying texts at the tertiary level, and (ii) were at best a very indirect description (even to the specialist) of the behaviour (e.g. reading and writing) which marks the expected proficiencies. Nearly all proposals for tertiary-level ELT reform in the past have essentially been attempts to extend, in some form, the 'structural approach' beyond a structurally-graded syllabus—under the label of 'remedial English,' 'Language through literature,' etc.
2. During 1976–77, the University Grants Commission of India sponsored a series of workshops in different parts of the country to discuss university syllabuses in English. The series culminated in a national workshop held at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, which produced, as a concensus, a broad syllabus for undergraduate students, stated in terms other than structural and in a way that could be related to the study of texts. The syllabus attempted to specify reading and writing abilities in terms such as the following:—
- (i) Basic reference skills: use of dictionaries, library catalogues, indexes of books.
 - (ii) Intensive reading of factual and expository material.
 - (iii) Adjusting speed and strategy to matter and purpose of reading.
 - (iv) Independent reading for enjoyment (without a formal examination but with credit in internal assessment for evidence of having done the reading, not for ability to write about it).
 - (v) Close, critical reading (for interpretation, analysis, assessment) of discursive as well as imaginative writing.
 - (vi) Coherent writing (narrative, factual, descriptive and explanatory); making and using notes and schematic plans.
 - (vii) Using different forms of written communication: letters (official, semi-official) of request, inquiry, complaint, explanations, etc.; reports, proposals, applications, announcements, etc.
 - (viii) Expository writing: presenting information or arguments from different points of view or for different purposes, with attention to type of reader and form of discourse.

Equally importantly, the syllabus contained the stipulation that "examinations should use unseen passages to test reading skills and should emphasise the

language skills aimed at rather than the content of the textbooks used." This meant, first, that texts (of various kinds) had to be used in the classroom in order to practise the skills listed in the syllabus (and demanded by the examination) and, secondly, examination questions could not be predicted on the basis of the texts used.

3. The new syllabus was taken up for implementation by the University of Bombay (for its 5000 first-year BA students being taught by about a hundred teachers in forty different colleges, some of them 3000 miles from the seat of the university) in the academic year 1977-78. A specially-constituted ELT Cell at the University performed a 'remote-control' function consisting of the following tasks:

- 3.1 It analysed and further articulated the skills mentioned in the 'national' syllabus, attempting at the same time to build a hierarchy of levels in each skill. Examples are:

Reading: Level 1: Understanding of plain meaning (based on an interpretation of complex sentences and vocabulary) and the logic of presentation.
 Level 2: Recognition of register and tone; interpretation of rules and tables; understanding of suggested meaning.
 Level 3: Understanding of implications; evaluation of form and detail; prediction.

Writing: Level 1: Factual presentation using suggested information and organisation.

Level 2: Persuasive writing (e.g. an argument) using suggested facts and/or organisation.

Level 3: Unguided writing using suggested situation but with independent selection of information and organisation.

- 3.2 It made a survey of available course-books, selected about ten which looked most relevant to the syllabus and recommended that teachers select and use one or more of those books, bearing in mind that the examination would not demand knowledge of any particular book.
- 3.3 It designed an examination which (i) used unseen reading texts and unrehearsed writing tasks (of, however, the kind presented and practised in the recommended course-books), (ii) tested the different skills (viz. reading, note-making, writing) directly, without resorting to the 'analytical' procedure of testing structure, vocabulary etc. separately, (iii) used a hierarchy of difficulty levels (based on the hierarchy built into the syllabuses) and distributed weightings to the different levels in such a way that even a relatively weak student, given a year's effort, would have a fair chance of crossing the passing mark while those with higher abilities would score correspondingly

higher, (iv) provided ample illustration (about six questions of category – hence six model examination papers) of the different types of question, thus giving teachers and learners, in effect, a more concrete specification of the syllabus, and (v) ran sample tests in several colleges at the end of each college term to find out (among other things) if the weightings assigned to different levels of difficulty were fair in relation to the general level of the student Population.

- 3.4 It also organised a series of short (3 days to 3 weeks) teacher-orientation programmes chiefly for the purposes of (i) ensuring that teachers understood the nature of the new syllabus and examination, and (ii) illustrating the teaching procedures (and choice of materials) that would best prepare students for the examination.
4. This programme seems, from evidence that has become available over a year, to have gone some way in meeting the three problems listed at the beginning of this paper: it seeks to influence the teaching procedures of numerous teachers not by training (inevitably small) groups of teachers, as has been the attempt in the past, but by changing the context of teaching (syllabus, examinations) in a way that induces the desired change; it eliminates the short-cuts so far available to examination-passing (by doing away with 'prescribed' text books); and it makes productive use of the prevalent preference for text-based teaching and learning. There are indications that the monologue in the classroom is giving way to a dialogue – teachers have been heard to say that students themselves are beginning to resist the lecture, and demanding that they be allowed to work through, for instance, a reading-comprehension exercise. At last two other universities (viz. those of Madras and Bangalore) are at present preparing to introduce programmes similar to Bombay University's.
5. What has been described above is not an advance in English for Academic Purposes in the sense of new research or new materials. It is however an instance of experimentation – bold, in the light of its circumstances described at the beginning – which (i) puts to use some of the recent thinking in EAP (hence the non-structural syllabus), (ii) explores and deals with problems of feasibility in a complex teaching situation, and (iii) perhaps most importantly, creates a teaching context where academic advances in EAP (e.g. analysis, materials) are likely to be relevant and usable.